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WORLD-POLITICS.

LONDON : ATHENS.

LONDON, *November, 1909.*

ON November 4th the Budget passed its third reading in the House of Commons by a majority of 230. Thus ended the most prolonged and the most arduous struggle in which the Lower Chamber has engaged in our time. Between the date of its introduction and the final vote on its third reading the Budget had held the centre of the political stage for rather over six months; it had engrossed no fewer than seventy-three days of Parliamentary time; it had been responsible for over five hundred and fifty divisions; and though the principles on which it was based still stand, there is scarcely a clause, scarcely even a line, in its provisions that has not been radically changed. The Opposition, though a pitiful minority in the House, fought it unflinchingly from first to last with brilliant desperation. The Government, anxious above all things to avoid a too drastic use of the closure and to disarm all reasonable objections, wisely allowed the debates to drag on to unexampled lengths, and wisely modified or sacrificed innumerable details of its Bill to meet the criticisms of its opponents. The thoroughness with which the measure has been discussed, the alterations it has undergone, the time it has consumed and the extraordinary ability with which it has been defended and attacked, together make up a record in Parliamentary annals. Not the least remarkable feature of its history was the impressive majority by which it was finally passed. The Liberal Party has never been famous for its discipline and cohesion. It represents, and must always represent, an infinitely wider range and variety of interests and opinions than the Conservatives; and nobody would have been surprised if the introduction of so vast, novel and controversial a Bill had driven the less progressive elements into revolt. Nothing of the kind hap-

pened. There were Liberal critics in plenty on this point and on that, but when it came to the ultimate decision the party polled what was practically its full strength. No measure of such a scope and character has ever emerged from the ordeal of debate with so little loss to the party proposing it. The Irish Nationalists, it is true, declined to vote for it, but they did not vote against it, and their leader, Mr. Redmond, made it clear that if the Budget were to become an issue between Lords and Commons, he and his followers would side with the latter.

Under ordinary circumstances the passage of the Budget through the House of Commons would mean the end of the long and vehement contest it has provoked. Under the actual circumstances of to-day, however, it may prove the prelude to an even longer and more vehement struggle. On November 8th it went up to the House of Lords and was there read a first time. On November 22nd the crucial debate on the second reading will begin. This letter, therefore, is written under considerable difficulties. Before it appears in print the fate of the Budget in the Upper Chamber will in all probability have been decided, and the whole world will know of it. But here in London, on the very edge of a crisis unique in British history, nobody can definitely say what line the Lords will take. From the mass of rumors and counterrumors, however, I gather a deepening impression that they will assume the responsibility of rejecting the Budget. That is the almost universal expectation. It is one that, with a respectful confidence in the political sanity of the Upper Chamber, I have myself long refused to entertain. But I confess that as the supreme moment draws near my confidence is slipping from me. The preponderance of opinion is heavily on the side of the view that the Lords will not accept the Budget—and anything short of a full and unqualified acceptance, I need hardly say, is the equivalent of rejection. A dispassionate observer may still retain his doubts, may still reflect that the King has yet to be heard from, may still hope that even at the eleventh hour the Lords will shrink from so perilous a course, a course that not only violates the settled practice of the Constitution, but is fraught with real and formidable risks to the powers and privileges of their own House. At the same time, however, if his business is to chronicle and explain the development of English affairs with impartiality, he will admit that the foundations

of his optimism grow daily more precarious. I propose, therefore, in this letter to treat as an accomplished fact what at the moment of writing is no more than a probability, and to assume that by the time the December number of this REVIEW is published the Lords will have thrown out the Budget.

The influences that will have urged them to a step which is essentially a revolution are many and various. Mr. Lloyd George's slashing and not over-tactful or over-tasteful attacks on the land-owning aristocracy are undoubtedly one of them. The ceaseless repetition by Liberal speakers and writers that the Lords "will never dare" reject the Finance Bill is another. It has operated on the minds of many Peers as a challenge which they feel they owe it to their order to take up. Again, while it is realized that the rejection of the Budget must precipitate the Constitutional crisis, it is also realized that its acceptance will not avert it. Altogether apart from the Finance Bill circumstances have been working during the last four years to elevate the House of Lords into the position of the master-question of English politics. The issue, argues more than one Peer, will have to be joined sooner or later. Why not meet it boldly and at once by throwing out the Finance Bill? It is clear that, whatever the fate of the Budget, there will be a General Election in January and that the House of Lords will in any case be a leading issue in that election. Matters cannot be made worse, they may be bettered, if the question of the Lords is made to turn on their action in throwing out the Budget. For the Budget has undoubtedly offended many powerful interests that may be trusted to rally to the side of the Lords; the ground, therefore, will be not unfavorably chosen, and the reaction which sets in against every Government after a few years of office will tell against the Liberals and in favor of the Lords.

Such are some of the arguments one hears among the anti-Budget stalwarts in the Upper House. To a great many Peers the Budget is synonymous with a something they call Socialism and throwing it out is justified as a patriotic and religious duty. At the least, they claim that it embodies principles that are wholly novel in the fiscal history of Great Britain, and that before it is passed into law the people ought to be given an opportunity of pronouncing judgment. But stronger, perhaps, than any of these arguments is the conviction that if the Budget becomes law, it will

prove so productive, it will so overwhelmingly demonstrate the efficacy of Free-Trade finance to provide for all the national needs as to make Tariff Reform not merely superfluous, but ridiculous. Finally the belief is gathering strength that the Budget is by no means so popular as it seemed to be two or three months ago, that the people would welcome its rejection, and that the result of the Bermondsey election—where, in one of the poorest constituencies in London, a Tariff Reform and anti-Budget candidate slipped in between a Liberal and a Socialist—is an invitation to the Lords to act decisively. Most of the Conservative papers in the metropolis and in the provinces clamor for the destruction of the Budget, and even sober and independent journals like the “*Spectator*” urge the Lords only to pass the land and liquor clauses on condition that they are ratified by a referendum of the people.

But let there be no mistake about it. If the Lords, in obedience to these various forces and considerations, reject the Budget, they will be committing what is hardly less than an act of usurpation, they will be upsetting the recognized balance of Constitutional power, they will be taking a step which, whether with or without their strict legal and theoretical competence, is as plainly revolutionary as though the King were to refuse his assent to a Bill that had been passed by both Houses of Parliament. If, moreover, their act is condoned by the electorate, it will mean that henceforward no Government will be able to remain in power which does not control the Upper Chamber; it will mean that England, hitherto a supposedly democratic country, is really under the thumb of an oligarchy; it will mean that the Lords are the supreme power in the Constitution, able to dissolve Parliaments and upset Governments as they please; it will mean that the old principle that taxation and representation should go together has been destroyed; it will mean that no Liberal Ministry can ever again hold its own except on sufferance, and that it will be liable at any moment to find its financial provisions for the year rejected and itself deprived of the means to carry on the King's Government. If, on the other hand, the claim of the Lords to have an equal or superior right to that of the Commons to control the national finances is not endorsed by the nation, if the Lords reject the Budget only to find that the people insist on its being passed, then in that case, too, equally serious results must ensue. To prevent any such disturbance of the normal

Constitutional procedure in the future would at once become not merely a prime object, but a prime necessity of Liberal policy. No Liberal Government would again take office without stringent guarantees that the Lords should keep their hands off finance altogether and that their power of veto in other directions should be sensibly curtailed. How those guarantees could be obtained and what form they should take are matters that very soon may be the leading issues of English politics.

There is another point that ought to be touched upon. The uncertainty as to what the Lords will do with the Budget has already had a serious effect on trade. But the rejection of the Budget will mean nothing less than financial and administrative chaos. This will become clear from a glance at the British system of collecting revenue. When new taxes are imposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or existing taxes are raised, the collection of the tax is authorized by a Resolution of the House of Commons. This Resolution is passed by the House within an hour or two after the Chancellor has brought in his Budget. It is then telegraphed to the customs-houses at the different ports, and on the following day the collection of the new taxes begins. These Resolutions of the House are accorded the force of law—a fact which strikingly emphasizes the predominance of the Commons in matters of finance. Although the new taxes have not themselves been adopted by the House of Commons or authorized by statute or even discussed in the Lords, yet their collection is permitted on the strength of the Resolutions. Mr. Lloyd George introduced his Budget on April 29th. On the following morning his imposts began to be levied on spirits, tobacco, incomes, estates, and so on, and they are being levied at this moment. Millions upon millions of pounds have thus passed into the Exchequer within the last six months on the presumption that the Resolutions possess the validity of law—a presumption which in its turn rests on the presumption that the Finance Bill will become law. But what if the Finance Bill does not become law? What is then the status of the Resolutions? Would not every penny collected by the authorities have been illegally collected? Would not every taxpayer have a right to recover from the Government the amount he has paid during the past six months? Such are a few of the practical problems involved in the fate of the Budget at the hands of the House of Lords.

ATHENS, November, 1909.

THE Greek race, which is among the most gifted of the globe, is also the most unfortunate. The individual Greek, sober, hard-working, good-natured, almost always wins the day in the struggle for existence, while the nation, whimsical as a woman, unreasonable as a child, lacks the political, military and naval equipment for holding its own under the new conditions. And it will soon have to bear the painful consequences. Indeed, some of them have begun to make themselves felt already, and it is doubtful whether anything now feasible can shield it from the worst. Forty-six years ago when George I grasped the sceptre the future of the race was in his hands, and a twofold task was set him worthy to tempt the most generous ambition—the political training of his subjects and the fusion into one Empire of the six million Greeks now scattered over Asia Minor. But King George, like the nobleman's servant in the Gospel, hid his talent in a napkin. Whether it was in him to accomplish the feat, had he tried earnestly, there is now no means of knowing. What is certain is that the King is endowed with more than average powers, and in mental structure and capacity is not inferior either to King Charles of Roumania or to the late Prince Alexander of Battenberg. Yet the sovereign of the former country may be truly said to have regenerated his subjects, so wonderfully have they developed from a horde of semi-barbarians into a progressive nation under his wise rule.

To blame King George and him alone for this disastrous failure would be a gross injustice. The prostration of Greece is the inevitable effect of many causes, of which his attitude was certainly one. But it is commonly believed to have been the decisive one. Those who know the King best assert what facts would appear to confirm, that he is firmly opposed to the maintenance of a formidable army and navy, that he relies upon the great Powers for results which Bulgaria and Roumania win by dint of military superiority, and that he implicitly carried out the alleged behests of Russia and Great Britain to eschew close relations with the other Balkan states. If this be, indeed, a fair presentment of the King's policy there is something to be said in support of it—theoretically. But in practice it has broken down. The fortunes of the Greek race were never at a lower ebb. Even Crete has been snatched away by Young Turkey.

The language recently used by the Porte in its communications with King George's Government was not merely haughty, it was insulting. The biggest schoolboy in the class might address such language to the newcomer with whom he was minded to pick a quarrel. And Greece, without army, navy or helpful friends among the Powers, had to bend her neck low, comply with Turkey's demands and smile sweetly the while.

Those two events—the loss of Crete and the insulting notes of the Porte—came to the army as a dire revelation. Greece resembled Lazarus at the rich man's door, but without any hope of ever reaching Abraham's bosom. Theretofore the officers, like the rest of the nation, had been living in a visionary world where, if there were storm clouds and rain showers, it was only in order that the frequent sunshine might be all the more enjoyable. True, there had been an ominous revelation long before. The war of 1897 which King George materially contributed to bring on in the delusion that Russia and Great Britain would veto hostilities in the nick of time had culminated in disaster. The army which had marched only for show had fled before the Turks like a flock of sheep. The royal princes had been sent to the front on the understanding that they were not to be exposed to danger, and the elaborate precautions taken to keep them out of harm's way in Thessaly had thwarted the strategic plans of Smolensky and others. Athwart these symptoms a statesman would have descried the writing on the wall. But the Greeks are not far-seeing, have short memories and live on roseate hopes. When disaster was upon them, they formed strong resolutions to reorganize the army, to make it an efficient weapon of defence, and to eliminate from its direction the princes whose qualities were decidedly not martial. But a few years later the nation had forgotten its misfortunes and the responsible politicians were chanting not the *Dies iræ dies illa*, but *Ca ira*. The most typical man of this class, M. Theotokis, the personification of graceful indolence and inane eloquence, blithely undertook to inaugurate a new era of prosperity by substituting for army reform the creation of the post of commander-in-chief of the forces and conferring it upon the unwarlike young Crown Prince.

If the foregoing errors of Greek Cabinets were mischievous, this blunder of M. Theotokis was fatal. For it rendered the state helpless at the critical moment of all others in its history

when it ought to have been strong in will, fixed in aim and ready to incur heavy risks for vital interests and secular aspirations. The island of Crete, often promised to Greece by the Powers, came well within her grasp during this period of collapse, but she lacked the strength to take a firm grip and it dropped from her nerveless fingers. Powerful neighbors rose up around her, waxing in strength, growing in extent and setting themselves aims which ran directly counter to hers. Turkey obtained a new lease of power; Roumania established claims to recompense which will one day be honored; Bulgaria gathered strength enough to stand forth as a candidate for the hegemony of the Balkans. But Greece remains prostrate. And she has so little chance of ever recovering the lost ground that King George's contention—that an army is a needless luxury—from the political heresy which it was some years ago is become a self-evident axiom to-day.

None of these national and racial reverses caused their authors a moment's misgiving. M. Theotokis's notion of the duties of a Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs was akin to his royal master's ideal of a Greek army. The King held that the Powers who had created the Hellenic State would also protect it. His favorite Prime Minister maintained that England and Russia should dictate Greece's foreign policy while King George should appoint her diplomatists,* one of whom is known as his *âme damnée*. And that summary programme was conscientiously carried out during the period of Theotokist quiescence at the cost of heavy sacrifices, ethical as well as patriotic. A few years ago, for example, King George broke faith with King Charles of Roumania and precipitated a costly quarrel which is still acute. The Austrian Government, desirous of bringing about a closer agreement between the two states, had arranged for the two monarchs to meet at Abbazia. They accordingly came together and struck an agreement which was distasteful to Russia and might have become unpleasant for Bulgaria. But King George, in deference to the Tsar's Government, declined to carry it out, and the result was a serious rupture between the two states which has not yet been healed.

Meanwhile the Crown Prince played havoc with the army.

* On one occasion the King induced a brother sovereign to interfere with the appointment of Hellenic diplomatists under circumstances which throw an unpleasant light on the transaction.

The new post of commander-in-chief carried with it the powers of a dictator and the King's heir used them to the fullest. The young Prince, and he alone, was competent to promote officers or pass them over without check or question. And he made it clear from the first that personal like or dislike was the sole standard he would acknowledge. The Cabinet was nominally responsible for the efficacy of the troops, which an impetuous and irresponsible young man had it in his power to reduce to a state of disorganization and mutiny by arbitrary and unjust measures. And Prince Constantine's acts were superlatively arbitrary and unjust. The very best officers, including Smolensky, Tsorbas and Konstantinidi, were decently or indecently buried. Boon companions of the pleasure-hunting princes were promoted over their heads for accomplishments which needed orgies, not military manœuvres, as their proper setting. Money was spent for everything but the nation's defences. When Prince George went out in his private yacht for his private pleasure, it was coaled at the nation's expense.

This undoing of the nation is set currently down as the handiwork of M. Theotokis, the Crown Prince and the King. And none of the three seems to have been upset by it. On the contrary, the Prime Minister must have looked upon it as a title to admiration when he exclaimed that the Chamber was no place for any deputy who fancied that the country could be governed otherwise than he had been governing it.

The army alone was stirred to its depths. Some officers were moved by purely personal aims, others by purely patriotic motives, and a third contingent by a mixture of both. The chiefs met in secret conclave, formed a military league and resolved to be no longer a silent party to their country's shame. They would ask the Chamber to employ the machinery of the Constitution, first to sweep away the obstacles to reform, then to reorganize the land and sea defences and finally to abandon once for all the ruinous game of parliamentary shuttlecock and conduct the affairs of state for the welfare of the nation and not in the interests of a party. Before this programme had been formulated M. Theotokis, fearing the anger of the masses, resigned his place to M. Rhallis, from whom I received the whole story.

One of the Opposition leaders in the Chamber, M. Mavromichalis, had long advocated a series of measures which was

well-nigh identical with the officers' programme. And to him the King now appealed to form a Cabinet and to parley with the military mutineers. M. Mavromichalis, from whose lips I have received this part of the narrative, undertook the task with the alacrity of a patriot, but with the misgivings of a man whose sight is sharp enough to reveal to him the difficulties with which it bristled. Happily the chief of the Officers' League, Colonel Tsorbas, is a most moderate officer. It was he who had been passed over for eight years by the Crown Prince, while youthful carpet knights with downy cheeks who took virtue by storm and gained promotion by favor were being pitchforked over his head. It was he, too, whom M. Rhallis counselled the King to summon as head of the Government, but the sovereign shrank from the suggestion in horror on the ground that Colonel Tsorbas, to be revenged on the crown, might take it into his head to imprison the King and the royal princes. "Had any less level-headed man than Colonel Tsorbas been at the head of the league," M. Mavromichalis recently said to me, "the negotiations would have broken down and the last effort to restrict the revolution within constitutional bounds would have been a failure. Colonel Tsorbas has merited well of the country." So, too, did the present premier, M. Mavromichalis, who passed through an agonizing ordeal before he had struck up an understanding between himself and the Military League which the crown was willing to accept. The main terms on which the three parties finally agreed were an amnesty for the mutineers, the abolition of the post of commander-in-chief of the forces and of the general staff, and the exclusion of the royal princes from the army.

There was one other condition laid down by the league which to an outsider appears ungenerous as well as impolitic. It was to the effect that the five officers who, having held aloof from the mutineers, remained faithful to the King and risked their lives for him should be indicted for these "offences" and dismissed from the army. In reality they were heroes. The risk they incurred was described to me by the chief of the league, Colonel Tsorbas himself, who twice saved them from death. "I was in the camp outside the city when Colonel Metaxas came. We were all highly excited, as men may well be who are playing *va banque* not only for their lives, but for the life of the nation. And this officer was come out to undo our work just when success

was about to crown it. He called upon his soldiers to quit us and go back with him. What happened then is hard to describe. There was a wild scene of confusion in which bayonets, daggers and butt-ends of rifles menaced his life. I ran forward and hugged him tight. I was helped by some comrades who surrounded him, and we got him off to a place of safety. After this a proposal was made to send him before a field court martial. Had this been done, he would have been sentenced to death. I again interposed, and I finally carried my point and had him sent for trial before a military council which did not meet until passion was no longer at white-heat. His sentence has been only dismissal from the army. And even from this he may appeal later on." This plea is undoubtedly strong, though it leaves one point unanswered: Why did the league obtain an amnesty for its own members while depriving the five officers who had taken the King's part of the benefit of it? To this query there is a tentative reply. Hitherto in Greece nothing, it is urged, has ever been taken seriously. There is no hell or heaven, no angel or devil, no inexplicable sin. Political life has been a battle of shadows as in Walhalla. If, therefore, the league were to dissolve to-day the old order of things would revive to-morrow. And the officers are bent on remedying this fatal deficiency.

The officers' part in all this hardly calls for justification. But the part played by the King in this matter of the faithful officers cannot be disposed of so easily. It has provoked heated discussions and called forth scathing comments. At first he refused to ratify the sentence of expulsion from the army passed upon the officers Metaxas and Kalinsky. For their sole "offence" was an act which every officer ought to commit and every monarch ought to reward. Later on his Majesty yielded to the insistence of the league and affixed his signature to the decree. It is no exaggeration to say that no such humiliation has been inflicted upon any monarch in modern times. Even Abdul Hamid, after his absolute power was broken, was not subjected to such a crushing ordeal.

NOTE.—Since the despatch of this letter an abortive naval mutiny took place at Salamis. Naval Lieutenant Typaldos was chosen as the head of a secret association of junior officers in the navy. At the head of some 300 officers and sailors the flotilla of destroyers raised the flag of revolt, seized the arsenal in Salamis and engaged the battleship "Hydra." They were soon overpowered by the latter, aided by artillery from the mainland opposite, and the arsenal was speedily recovered.—EDITOR.